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OxyContin maker must pay \$19.5M

The Associated Press

HARTFORD, Conn. — Drug maker Purdue Pharma L.P. has agreed to pay \$19.5 million to 26 states — including Ohio and Kentucky — and the District of Columbia to settle complaints that it encouraged physicians to overprescribe its powerful painkiller OxyContin.

State attorneys general complained that the Stamford-based company urged doctors to prescribe OxyContin every eight hours instead of the 12-hour dose approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

"We're raising the bar on off-label marketing and other promotion tactics that lead to abuse and diversion of prescription drugs," Connecticut Attorney General Richard Blumenthal said.

Purdue denied Tuesday it had been pushing inappropriate dosing.

Among other things, the settlement requires Purdue to abide by warnings on a packaging insert, stop marketing the drug for use in unapproved ways and improve internal controls.

Purdue agreed to stop basing bonuses for sales staff only on the volume of OxyContin prescribed.

OxyContin is a time-release painkiller that can be highly addictive. Designed to be swallowed whole and digested over 12 hours, the pills can produce a heroinlike high if crushed and then swallowed, snorted or injected.

The Bush administration's anti-drug plan singles it out as one of the most-abused prescription drugs.